

JOURNAL-NEWS

Proposed Rebates May Cut Ohio College Costs

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Plans put forward earlier this month by Miami University and other Ohio public colleges to make them more affordable — including rebates to students who take full course loads — impressed Senate President Keith Faber. Institutions were required to outline how they intend to create at least a 5 percent cost savings for students — a provision Faber added into the state budget. Local schools' plans include everything from discounting textbooks to getting students out the door faster. Some of the proposals have already been enacted.

State officials say recent tuition freezes have prevented cost spikes, however, they say more needs to be done to make college affordable. Faber, R-Celina, and Gov. John Kasich favored an approach where colleges would self-identify ways to lower cost.

“We were not surprised by this,” said Claire Wagner, Miami University’s spokeswoman. “Our president, Dr.

(David) Hodge has a very good vision that became our 2020 plan that focuses on cost, sustainability, and by being better and efficient at what we do. We started this a few years ago.”

The plan Miami officials developed in response to the legislative mandate has been divided into two components: options for students that directly lower the cost of attending Miami and options that enable a student to graduate within three years or 3.5 years.

Wagner said both components individually exceed the target that was legislated and greatly exceed the target collectively. She said the added advantage of the changes that will better enable students to graduate one or two semesters early is that these students will not only lower their cost of attendance but accelerate their employment and earnings opportunities.

More than 60 percent of all majors offered at Miami include a three year path to degree completion, she said. Better advising and other support services identify these pathways and help students stay on a course to graduate within a shortened time frame, Wagner said. In addition, the university said proactive and personalized advising is a key to student success.

She said that one area the university is focusing on proactive and personalized advising is a key to student success. The university is assigning faculty advisers to students in their freshmen year rather than their sophomore year. Wagner said this was something that the student government wanted and some faculty needed to get some training to do this. Miami plans to better communicate these options and to better support students who desire to graduate in less than four years.

Three pathways already exist at Miami University for graduating in a shorter time frame: no tuition for credit hours enrolled above 12 credit hours, significant college credit earned before enrolling at Miami and the completion of far more hours toward graduation than the minimum required. Improved scheduling, including offering a new winter term, will help students obtain more credits in less time. “We have the good fortune in that a lot of students come to Miami with a number of credits that they earned through College Credit Plus so that they are able to graduate earlier,” Wagner said. “Some do stay the entire four years as students may want to do a double-major or take a semester to travel abroad or do an internship and other opportunities to get the full undergraduate experience.” On Thursday, John Fortney, a spokesman for Faber, said he was uncertain if Faber had looked at Miami’s plan.

“Overall, he’s been satisfied with what’s he’s seen,” Fortney said.

In particular, Faber is excited about proposals by Wright State and Clark State Community College to offer students rebates if they take full course loads.

“Wright State already had one of the lowest tuition plans in the state — God bless them,” Faber said. “(This) shows President (David) Hopkins is a real leader.”

Wright State’s rebate will be enacted next year. Here’s how it will work: If a student completes 24 credit hours in a given fall and spring semester, they would earn a 20 percent discount on a course the following summer semester. That represents a possible savings of \$945 over four years.

Clark State began offering a similar rebate for the fall semester, awarding rebates totaling \$33,450 to 314 students.

Faber says it’s better to put rebates toward tuition, rather than sending a check to the student.

“If someone had sent me rebate, I would have had a good weekend or a spring break trip, maybe new tires, but it was not going toward tuition,” Faber said.

Rep. Mike Duffey, R-Worthington, is the chair of the Finance Sub-committee on Higher Education. He said rewarding students to stay on track for graduation is key.

Duffey points out that the majority of the universities in Ohio charge the same amount for 12 credit hours as they do for 18. That means, according to Duffey, if students take only 12 credit hours they lose out on six credit hours, and may have to stay in school longer than four years.

“People would be shocked to know how many students are going five or six years,” Duffey said. “Students are driving up the cost by going a fifth year. To be totally honest, some are partying too hard.”

In addition to increased cost, Duffey says taking five or six years to graduate can send the wrong message to employers.

“It’s something that’s going to prompt someone to ask a question,” he said.

A handful of institutions proposed saving students more than 5 percent, including Wright State, which wants to expand College Credit Plus and reduce the cost of textbooks. If all of Wright State’s ideas were implemented, it could potentially save a student \$8,044 over the course of four years, or 9.1 percent of

the cost of attendance.

Here’s how much proposals by local colleges and universities could potentially save students per year: Central State University, \$1,319 (6.9 percent); Clark State, \$1,241 (23 percent); Miami University, \$2,594 (8.6 percent); Ohio State University, \$2,446 (9.6 per- cent); Sinclair Community College, \$392 (7.9 percent); and the University of Cincinnati, \$2,179 (8.8 percent).

The proposals do not guarantee a 5 percent savings for every student. In addition, many of the plans have already been implemented.

John Carey, chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education — which in late September changed its name from Ohio Board of Regents — called the plans a “valuable exercise” and “one from which all of our students will benefit in the future.”

Faber said the next step is for the state to review the proposals and identify a list of “best practices.” He also says that the legislature chose to push schools with the “carrot instead of the stick” and that might change if schools do not make serious efforts to lower costs.

“The governor issued a public warning to (colleges and universities), to meet his and the legislature’s satisfaction or more serious measures will be taken,” Duffey added.

Richard Vedder, an economics professor at Ohio University who specializes in higher education, would like to see the state push the universities harder.

“It’s a good idea, but this is overdue,” he said. Vedder wants to see the state push universities to cut administrative cost — something, according to an analysis by this newspaper, that has grown \$1.4 billion over the course of the past decade. “There

isn’t one institution in the state that couldn’t cut 100 positions,” Vedder said. “Some of them would be administrative assistants, sustainability coordinators, diversity experts or public relations experts.

“If you can cut 100 positions from Wright State, you can probably cut 300 or 500 at OSU.”

POTENTIAL COLLEGE SAVINGS

How much students could save at some Ohio colleges if proposed cost-cutting plans are enacted:

Institution	Average one-year cost of attendance	Average four-year cost of attendance	Potential one-year savings	Potential four-year savings	Potential percent savings
Clark State Community College	\$5,401	n/a	\$1,241	n/a	23.00%
Cincinnati State Technical and Community College	\$5,820	n/a	\$795	n/a	13.70%
Ohio University	\$24,472	\$97,888	\$3,332	\$13,330	13.60%
Ohio State University	\$25,552	\$102,208	\$2,446	\$9,784	9.60%
Wright State University	\$21,990	\$87,960	\$2,011	\$8,044	9.10%
University of Cincinnati	\$24,714	\$98,856	\$2,179	\$8,715	8.80%
Miami University	\$30,149	\$120,597	\$2,594	\$10,375	8.60%
Sinclair Community College	\$4,987	n/a	\$392	n/a	7.90%
Central State University	\$19,140	\$76,560	\$1,319	\$5,274	6.90%
Edison Community College	\$6,580	n/a	\$372	n/a	5.60%



Miami University recently submitted a plan to lower costs 5 percent for students. Miami's plan could potentially save a student \$2,594 over four years.
GREG LYNCH / STAFF